Julia Lementino, a Zuni Indian, bakes bread; Lemuel Paya and his granddaughter pose for camera. They were interviewed by U. of U.

cooperative study by universities

They're Learning History—From The Indians

by Karl Young

RECENTLY A CROW Indian had his say about the white man's use of tobacco. It was anything but flattering. In a brief article in The Salt Lake Tribune on Ftb. 19, Henry Old Coyote was cited as expressing a deep resentment of the irreverent, careless use of tobacco by the whites, and he clinched his point by contrasting the restrained and dignified use of the plant by Indians, who reserved it primarily for ritualistic purposes.

This rather startling announcement was owing to the visit on the Crow Reservation of a research student equipped with a tape recorder and charged with the responsibility of interviewing as many old Crow Indians as he could find who would talk about the "way-far-back" times of their youth. The student was working under the direction of Dr. C. Gregory Crampton, Director of the Western History Center at the University of Utah.

One of Dr. Crampton's chief concerns at the present is the directing of a staff of trained individuals in the gathering of oral history from Indians in neighboring areas. The funding of the project is owing to the generosity of Miss Doris Duke, who, out of her private resources, is financing a plan to gather testimony from Indians in many Western tribes before all of the older individuals have died. The University of Utah is one of six universities involved in the project.

Using a tape recorder and microphone, Floyd A. O'Neil interviews Mrs. Lulu Wash Chapoose Brock at her home, located on Uintah-Ouray Reservation in eastern Utah.

EACH UNIVERSITY has been assigned an area of primary responsibility. For example, the University of Utah is recording interviews on tape with Indian informants from the White River and Uncompaghre Utes in the Uintah Basin; from Utes at Towaoc and Ignacio in southern Colorado; from Indians of the "frontier" pueblos along the upper reaches of the Rio Grande and from the Zunis in New Mexico; from Navajos in Utah; from Navajos, Hopis, Havasupais, Hualapais, and Paiutes in Arizona; from Paiutes, Goshutes, and Shoshones in Nevada; from Shoshones in Utah and Shoshones and Bannocks in Idaho; from Arapahoes and Shoshones in the Wind River country of Wyoming; and from the Crows in Montana. The coverage, as you see, is very broad, and it is intended to be very thorough. If the project goes well, it could extend over a period of several years.

Naturally, most of the Indians who took part in the Indian wars through the '60's, '70's, and '80's of the last century are counting their ponies in the everlasting sandhills now, and their testimonies, which could have been primary evidence of the Indian point of view is buried with them. What, then, can their descendants and fellow tribesmen give us that is worthwhile?

Well, first of all, we might lay aside, if we have ever entertained, a concept of history as being concerned with earth-shaking events only. Wars, peace conferences, treaties, and alliances among nations are indeed a part of history. But so, too, are the attitudes of the common people towards education, health, transportation, leisure, employment, and, in fact, anything else that involves us as human beings. The old Ute habit of loading things in a wagon and going down the Uintah River to visit friends and relatives for a week or two just when the lucerne was about ready to be cut used to drive the white Indian-farm advisers half crazy. Did the habit have anything to do with history?

THE ADVISERS WERE supposed to be helping the Indian agent to "civilize" the Utes, but these sons of nature dropped things and went visiting two or three times a summer. They let irrigation, and mowing, and any other irksome task imposed on them by the aggressive white men go sleep in the willows while they followed the old tribal pattern of enjoying life on friendly visits.

Should one blame the Utes if they did not immediately drop their old ways and pick up the white man's pattern gladly and wholeheartedly? After all, they had already done some adjusting when the whites took their cool mountain meadows in Colorado and forced them to pitch their tepees along the mosquito-ridden banks of the Green River and the Uintah out in Utah's badlands. Actually, the Indians had worked out a way of life which was quite satisfactory to them in the old days. Who can say that we, with our smog, our water pollution, our ghettos and over - population, and our war in Vietnam, can offer the Indian a way of life that is very much better?

Connor Chapoose, a Uintah Ute, told John Boyden in 1960 that one of the big concerns of the tribe in the early days was to move camp in such a way as to allow "crop rotation," like the Agent's Indian farmer says, that is, to give certain vegetation a chance to grow while the Indian camp moved on to another area where other vegetation was ready to use for feed. And we followed these patterns over spring and summer, returning to the original grounds in the fall, where there was good shelter.

PERHAPS THE WHITE man, with his flair for management, would find it difficult to pick flaws in this thoughtful way of treating the range which characterized Indian life in Utah a hundred years ago. It is good to have the long view, the perspective of the historian, if we are to evaluate life fairly.

The purpose of the oral history project will be to discover what the Indian side of the story was. It will be to get the Indian to speak as freely and frankly as he can about his people and their past. Every effort will be made not to make suggestions of the kind of answers we would like to hear, but to give the Indian confidence in himself and in the significance of his view of life.